

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2852

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 16767

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: JP'S CONDITION AND POLITICAL ROLE

REF: NEW DELHI 16450

1. ACCORDING TO CONGEN BOMBAY, A NUMBER OF J.P. NARAYAN'S FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES WHO SEE HIM REGULARLY HAVE CONFIRMED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS THAT HE MUST BE PUT ON DIALYSIS TWICE A WEEK AND THAT DOCTORS PRESENTLY FEEL THAT HE WILL HAVE TO UNDERGO DIALYSIS ON A REGULAR BASIS AS LONG AS HE LIVES (THOUGH PRE-SUMABLY AT A REDUCED RATE AS HE RESPONDS TO TREATMENT). DOCTORS APPARENTLY HAVE NOT DEFINITELY PINNED DOWN THE CAUSE OF THE DAMAGE BUT REPORTEDLY DO AGREE THAT HIS KIDNEYS HAVE BEEN VERY SEVERELY DAMAGED AND HAVE ALMOST STOPPED FUNCTIONING ALTOGETHER. THERE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SOME IMPROVEMENT IN HIS CONDITION - AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING - AND MOST OF THOSE SEEING HIM RECENTLY CONFIRM PRESS REPORTS THAT HE IS CHEERFUL AND ALERT. HOWEVER, NARAYAN HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY IMMOBILIZED AND WILL INDEED REMAIN "YESTERDAY'S MAN" IN INDIAN POLITICS.

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2. A WELL-INFORMED GUJARATI JOURNALIST CLOSE TO NARAYAN TOLD CONGEN BOMBAY DEC 15 THAT J.P. "REMAINS UNREPENTANT" AND REFUSES TO "BACK DOWN". ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, J.P. RECENTLY WROTE TO MRS GANDHI REPEATING WHAT HEIAD EARLIER TOLD P.N. DHAR, THAT IS, THAT HE WOULD COOPERATE WITH MRS GANDHI IF SHE WOULD RESCIND THE EMERGENCY AND "RETURN TO THE PATH OF GANDHI AND NEHRU" IN WHICH SHE, LIKE J.P., HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP. HE REPORTEDLY ACCUSED THE PRIME MINISTER OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE "POLITICAL DEGRADATION" IN INDIA.

3. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE RAJYA SABHA IN NEW DELHI TOLD EMBOFFS DEC 16 THAT HE UNDERSTOOD NARAYAN HAD CLIMBED DOWN FROM HIS "NO NEGOTIATION WITH ME ALONE" POSTURE AND OFFERED TO WITHDRAW HIS OWN ACTIVITY IN THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IF THE GOI WOULD FIX A FIRM DATE FOR ELECTIONS, RELEASE THOSE POLITICIANS BEING HELD, AND END THE EMERGENCY. IT WOULD THEN BE UP TO OTHER OPPOSITION POLITICIANS TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THEY WOULD DO. HE AGREED THAT NARAYAN WAS EFFECTIVELY OUT OF POLITICS PERSONALLY IN ANY EVENT AS A RESULT OF HIS ILLNESS.

4. WHILE WE HAVE HAD ONE POLITICIAN (FORMER FONMIN DINESH SINGH) TELL US THAT HE THOUGHT THE PM MIGHT RELEASE OPPOSITION POLITICIANS IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, WE HAVE NOT HEARD THIS FROM ANYONE ELSE. THE RAJYA SABHA DEPUTY CHAIRMAN DID NOT EXPECT TO SEE ANY OF THE IMPRISONED OPPOSITION MPS AT THE FORTHCOMING PARLIAMENTARY SESSION.

5. IN REFTEL EMBASSY OFFERED JUDGMENTS THAT NARAYAN'S DEATH WOULD NOT ELICIT SERIOUS DISTURBANCES AROUND THE COUNTRY. THIS VIEW IS GENERALLY SHARED BY CONGENS. CALCUTTA BELIEVES THAT THERE MAY BE SOME RIOTING IN BIHAR (THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN SOME AROUND UNIVERSITIES IN PATNA, ARRAH, GAYA, AND MUZAFFARPUR ABOUT TEN DAYS AGO WHEN IT WAS BELIEVED J.P. MIGHT BE ON THE VERGE OF DYING). BOMBAY IS ALSO NOT WILLING TO RULE OUT

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SPORADIC SCATTERED VIOLENCE IN LARGE URBAN AREAS OF GUJARAT AND MAHARASHTRA, PARTICULARLY BY STUDENTS, BUT DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS WOULD REACH SIGNIFICANT PROPORTIONS AND OBSERVES THAT THIS BELIEF IS SHARED BY SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS IN BOMBAY. J.P.'S STRENGTH HAS ALWAYS BEEN WEAKEST IN THE SOUTH AND NO SIGNIFICANT DISTURBANCES ARE EXPECTED THERE. EMBASSY DOES NOT EXPECT MORE THAN ISOLATED INCIDENTS IN NORTHERN

INDIA.

6. NARAYAN'S ILLNESS POSES NEW PROBLEMS OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY BOTH FOR OPPOSITION LEADERS (WHO MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY IN RALLYING TOGETHER, EVEN SHOULD THEY BE FREE TO TRY TO DO SO, AROUND A NEW LEADER OR A COMMON ACCEPTABLE PLATFORM IN THE ABSENCE OF J.P.'S PRESENCE AS A UNIFYING FORCE) AND FOR THE GOVT (DOUBT ABOUT NARAYAN'S HEALTH AND WHEN HE MIGHT DIE ACTS AS A FURTHER CONSTRAINT IN CONSIDERING ELECTIONS IN EARLY 1976, AS SCHEDULED).
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